

Protecting Yourself In Utah's Summer Heat

Utah has a variety of climates where the temperature fluctuates between the 80s and the low 100s during the summer months. Whether you live in St. George or Logan, heat can harm your health but harm can be prevented with good planning and by taking precautions.

Not everyone has the same risk of heat-related illness. Those at greatest risk for heat-related illness include infants and children up to four years of age, people 65 years of age and older, people who are overweight, and people who are ill or on certain medications. Other conditions that put you at risk are fever, heart disease, mental illness, poor circulation, sunburn, and prescription drug use and alcohol use. The following heat –related conditions can be prevented by following some simple steps.

Dehydration

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 300 people die of heat related illnesses every year. Early signs of dehydration include thirst, irritability, headache, dizziness, muscle cramping, nausea, vomiting, and weakness. During hot weather you will need to drink more liquid than your thirst indicates and follow these helpful steps.

- Don't drink liquids containing caffeine, alcohol, or lots of sugar—these types of drinks actually cause you to lose body fluid.
- Everyone is prone to heat-related illnesses but some people are at a higher risk, You should regularly check on infants and young children and people over the age of 65.
- Children should drink at least 1 cup, (8 ounces) (or sports drink) every 20 minutes before, during, and after activity. Adults should drink 2-4 glasses of non-alcoholic fluids each hour. A sports drink can replace the salts and minerals lost in sweat.
- Limit outdoor activities to morning and evening hours. Consider avoiding long walk, bike rides, any strenuous outdoor activity between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Try to stay in the shade. If you are out during the day's hottest hours take along plenty of cold water.
- When the temperature is in the high 90's, take a cool shower or bath, or move to an air-conditioned area to help cool off to prevent heat-related illnesses.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness. This can happen after several days of high temperatures and not drinking enough fluids. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are elderly people, those with high blood pressure, and those working or exercising in hot conditions. If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may progress to heat stroke. See medical attention if symptoms worsen or last longer than one hour. The warning signs of heat exhaustion include heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting and fainting. If you suspect heat exhaustion, you should:

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- Drink cool, non-alcoholic beverages
- Rest and take a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath.
- Seek an air-conditioned environment or get to a cool place.

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke is the most severe type of heat illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature: the body's temperature rises rapidly and is unable to sweat or cool down. Body temperature may rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

- Symptoms include warm and flushed skin, rapid pulse and a very high body temperature (at least 106 degrees F.) The person may also be delirious, unconscious, or having seizures.
- Reduce the victim's body temperature as soon as possible. This can be done by spraying the victim with cool water, or placing them in a tub of cold water. They should be taken to the hospital since various body organs can fail in heat stroke victims.
- If the victim's muscles are twitching uncontrollably, do not place any object in the mouth and do not give fluids. If there is vomiting, turn the victim on his or her side and be sure that the airway remains open.
- Pay special attention to the elderly, children and those with serious medical conditions.

Heat Entrapment

Nationally, about 25 children die each year as a result of being trapped in hot vehicles. When it's 80 degrees outside, it takes just 30 minutes for the temperature to reach 120 degrees inside a car. It is not okay to leave children in the car for "just a minute" to do some quick shopping - never leave a child alone in a car as "just a minute" is too long. Heat-related deaths can be prevented every time by following these steps:

- Always lock car doors and trunks—even at home—and keep keys out of children's reach so they cannot get in without your knowledge.
- Contact your automobile dealership about getting your vehicle fitted with a trunk release mechanism.
- Teach your children that vehicles, especially trunks, are not places to play.

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Sunburn

Because the sunburns you suffer as a child have been linked with a higher risk of skin cancer later in life, keeping kids' sensitive skin safe from the sun's rays is critical. With a combination of sunscreens, protective clothing and a little common sense, your whole family can have safe fun in the sun. Don't take the sun lightly – protect your skin with these tips:

- A Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 20 means that it should take 20 times longer to sunburn with the sunscreen, than if you stayed in the sunlight with put it on. An SPF 15 or higher with ultraviolet ray-blocking action is recommended.
- Wear t-shirts while swimming outdoors.
- Stay inside or seek shade during the peak hours of heat from 10 am to 4 pm.
- Tightly woven clothing helps block harmful solar radiation from reaching your skin. Loosely woven clothing is not adequate, since the gaps in the weave allow the radiation to pass through.
- Use a hat or sun visor to protect your head, eyes and neck. Baseball caps do not provide protection for your neck, the sides of your face or your ears; a wide-brimmed hat is better.
- Childhood sunburns are an indicator for an increased risk of skin cancers.

Remember to keep cool and use common sense. Drink plenty of fluid, replace salts and minerals, wear appropriate clothing and sunscreen, pace yourself, stay cool indoors, schedule outdoor activities carefully, use a buddy system, monitor those at risk, and adjust to the environment.

Disclaimer: These self-help measures are not a substitute for medical care but may help you recognize and respond promptly to warning signs of trouble. Your best defense against heat-related illness is prevention. Staying cool and making simple changes in your fluid intake, activities, and clothing during hot weather can help you remain safe and healthy.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Utah Department of Health, National SAFE KIDS Campaign.